

Federal Bar Council's Thanksgiving Day Lunch

United States Attorney Preet Bharara

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Ladies and Gentlemen, my name is Preet Bharara, and I am the new United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York.

It is an overwhelming honor to serve as the Chair of this prestigious luncheon and to welcome you all on this auspicious occasion.

Now, as is usually the case, there are two fundamental categories of people here: those who have life tenure. . . and those who would like to have life tenure.

That second category is, moreover, further divided into two subcategories – those who truly believe they would make excellent federal judges and those who do not.

If you are in the first subcategory, after lunch please form a single file line in front of Senator Schumer, with three copies of your resume, 10 references, and at least one sincere-sounding compliment.

If you are in the second subcategory, you are clearly attending the wrong luncheon.

If you are not sure to which category you belong, may I suggest that you spend some time at the open bar to build up your self-esteem.

Now, it is really a special treat to see the Emory Buckner Medal for Public Service being awarded to the senior Senator from New York, whom I have not seen since the day I was confirmed by the United States Senate.

Although I did not participate in the selection, this award could not be going to a more richly deserving public servant.

The son of an exterminator, he has, by dint of sheer hard work and determination, risen to become the third most powerful person in the entire Senate, which is especially impressive when you consider that he is not even the third most powerful person in his own house.

The boss there, of course, is his wife Iris Weinshal, who is a formidable force and public servant in her own right.

The Emory Buckner Medal is indeed a fitting honor for a man who cares more about New York than anyone else alive; who has never worked a day in his life for the money; and who has fought so hard to preserve the independence of the judiciary, the Justice Department, and the U.S. Attorneys who, in a way, serve both.

On a personal note, he has placed more confidence and faith and trust in me than any human being outside of my own immediate family.

So, on this Thanksgiving eve, I am thankful for that.

I am thankful, also, to be among such luminaries of the bench and bar this afternoon.

We are all of us, unfortunately, members of a much-maligned profession. Some of that, to be sure, is well deserved.

But I continue to believe that there is no more noble profession than this one.

And I continue to believe also that no person is better situated to preserve liberty, promote equality, and prevent human cruelty than the person who has genuinely dedicated himself to becoming both a servant and master of the law.

This room is full of evidence to support that belief. As I look upon this distinguished crowd, I see countless figures who have contributed so much in that service – whether by trying to enforce the law, apply the law, or interpret the law.

And the spirit of service that pervades this room and animates the Federal Bar Council, I think, burnishes the flagging reputation of lawyers everywhere.

On this Thanksgiving, while we are thankful for our own good fortune – and in many of your cases, the operative word really is “FORTUNE” – I hope we are also and always mindful of those who are not so fortunate.

In the world beyond these walls, there is as yet too much pain and persecution; too much suffering and sorrow; too much cruelty, intolerance, and injustice.

And so as we honor a singular public servant today, we should also be thankful for the countless other men and women who do so much, for so little, to protect and improve that world – from soldiers to social workers, from firefighters to federal agents.

Finally, to the young lawyers here, whose firms were generous enough to pay for your tickets to this lunch, let me say this: there is no better time than Thanksgiving to think deeply about how you might employ your law degree for the betterment of others.

Maybe you will increase your pro bono work at the firm; maybe you will apply to my Office. Maybe you will do both.

People spend their entire lives waiting for the opportunity to do something meaningful, to make a difference in the world.

Your law degree gives you that opportunity every single day. I sincerely hope you will seize it.

Now, it is my honor to call to the podium one of our greatest legal luminaries – a distinguished jurist and former United States Attorney – Judge David Trager.